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Designing the suburban church: the mid twentieth-century Roman Catholic churches of

Reynolds & Scott

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Abstract

The pioneering modern movement, liturgically centred, church architecture of the mid twentieth century has become increasingly well documented and understood. Yet, for a long time before the Second Vatican Council most architects and clergy rejected this movement, maintaining traditional approaches and architectural forms. The basilican type dominated Roman Catholic church architecture in mid twentieth-century Britain, drawing loosely on Gothic or Byzantine and Romanesque models, and widely built in the new suburbs of expanding cities. As a typical landmark feature of such suburbs, the conventional church demands to be taken seriously and understood. This article draws on recent work on suburban and middle-class culture to interpret a body of such churches by a prolific firm of church architects, Reynolds & Scott of Manchester. It makes use of a hitherto unexplored archive of the practice's drawings, an interview with a surviving partner, parish and diocesan archives, and consideration of many of the buildings. The conventional basilican church can be reassessed through this evidence. It presents a type of creativity and a design approach that differ from the values embraced by modernism, but that nevertheless engage with the modernity of the suburb in a complex hybridity between the modern and traditional, the sacred and the secular, religious and domestic cultures, the particular, the transnational and the universal.

Designing the suburban church: the mid twentieth-century Roman Catholic churches of Reynolds & Scott

The mid twentieth-century international modern movement in church architecture has recently become increasingly well documented, and a narrative of progress has become established in which pioneer architects and clergy built *avant garde* churches exploring ideas about lay participation and community through modernist architectural design principles.¹ Yet in characterising the twentieth-century church through such a narrative, it is easy to overlook the architecture of the overwhelming majority of new buildings that represented the typical experience of the modern church for most people at the same period, against which the modern movement aimed to distinguish itself. This article aims to rectify this imbalance by moving away from the canonical and *avant garde* to reassess the ordinary and typical, setting aside the value judgements that accompany the formation of a canon of progress. What might be called the ‘good-typical’ church can be seen as the product of no less thoughtfulness and creativity than the modernist church, though it may require an alternative frame of analysis to see this: one in which the church’s typical situation in the social and geographical setting of the twentieth-century suburb becomes a significant factor. To this end I focus on one firm of architects, Reynolds & Scott of Manchester, one of the most prolific but least known church designers in mid twentieth-century Britain, whose archive of drawings is examined for the first time here, and whose surviving partner, Brian Mooney, was interviewed for this article.²

The Roman Catholic church of St Ambrose, West Didsbury, in Manchester, opened in 1958, is typical of Reynolds & Scott’s mid twentieth-century churches, and is also typical in many ways of British Roman Catholic churches of this period (fig. 1). It is suburban in

location, set on the edge of an area of inter-war neo-Tudor houses, looking towards a modest post-war Garden Suburb-style estate of local authority housing across the road, and achieves an ideal of mid century Roman Catholic church architecture following 'traditional' lines. Indeed, all Reynolds & Scott's churches are sited in suburbs, sometimes in older areas of inter-war private or local authority housing, and many in post-war peripheral housing estates.

Visually prominent against the everyday backdrop of the city, St Ambrose could be interpreted as representing certain cultural aspects of the Catholic Church often attributed to this period: first, a tone of 'triumphalism', of new-found confidence in the articulation of a distinct identity following the gradual repeal of anti-Catholic legislation since the nineteenth century; and, second, an ideal of the 'fortress Church', its boundaries guarded by, for example, denominational education, evident through the siting of this church and many others next to a Catholic school.³ Both of these terms have been applied to describe the Catholic Church of the twentieth century before the Second Vatican Council, held from 1962 to 1965, and as all but a few of Reynolds & Scott's churches were designed before 1965 their eschewal of modernism may be held to typify this pre-conciliar attitude. Yet these churches' relationship to their surroundings suggests an alternative view: they can instead be interpreted as projecting an image congruent with the suburb rather than alien from it.

In considering the church in the context of the suburb I draw on recent scholarship on suburban religion and architecture. Claire Dwyer and David Gilbert's work on contemporary expressions of faith in the suburbs provides insights into the interactions between suburban and faith geographies. Considering the Church of England's inter-war church-building programme, for example, they see an institutional response to perceived suburban conditions, 'an attempt to remake suburbia' by affirming a village church and

parish ideal to confront the supposed alienation induced by the expanding modern city. At the same time they argue that this challenge to suburbia co-opted the material culture of these churches' modern surroundings.⁴ Likewise, Gretchen Buggeln's study of three mid century American architects in *The Suburban Church* attributes the buildings with conservative and homely characteristics, and argues for the church's importance in generating communities in otherwise fragmented suburban societies.⁵

The suburb itself has been examined with increasing sympathy, beginning with Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley's *Dunroamin*, whose multiple readings of the semi-detached house suggest material for interpreting church architecture.⁶ Roger Silverstone has turned suburban clichés into a celebratory theorisation of consumerism, conservatism and domesticity as the characteristics of suburban modernity, while Michael John Law's work on inter-war transport demonstrates that technological modernity dominated suburban mindsets even as it was absorbed and domesticated by consumers.⁷ Reynolds & Scott, and the parishes whose churches they designed, can be seen as participants in the suburban culture characterised in such studies. Yet their churches also transcend the immediate context of the suburb. They are complex hybrids, between tradition and modernity; between the sacred and the secular, the numinous and the domestic; between immediate and global contexts; between high architecture and the vernacular.

This investigation of the relationships between a design process and a suburban culture considers the architect as an interpreter of the client's intentions, against some geographers' and historians' positions extenuating the designer's agency in emphasising a broader social production of space. A building is the creative output of a person or practice as well as a reflection of the wider desires of its community of owners and users.⁸ Focusing on the architect does not mean rejecting a wider purview, but acknowledges other actors in

the design process and the later remaking of a building in use.⁹ Reynolds & Scott's churches were clearly the result of negotiation with parish priests and bishops. They were often decorated and changed after their initial construction, and they were received and reinterpreted by their congregations. Yet the architects' drawings define the initial spatial envelope, contributing to the formation of a place and its culture.

The practice was established in 1946 by Francis Reynolds and William Scott, taking over an existing practice in the Manchester office of Reynolds's first employer, Ernest Bower Norris, who had himself inherited an early twentieth-century practice. From its origins the firm specialised in Roman Catholic churches, Norris favouring a Byzantine-Romanesque style loosely inspired by J.F. Bentley's Westminster Cathedral and early Christian churches. His notable church of St John the Baptist in Rochdale of 1924 had a central dome and mosaics by Eric Newton of the Manchester firm of Ludwig Oppenheimer.¹⁰ Reynolds designed several churches on his own account in the 1930s, and after the war Reynolds & Scott maintained the practice's Byzantine-Romanesque style until around 1960. St Willibrord at Clayton, Manchester, of 1938 was typical of Reynolds's early work in this style (fig. 2), and Corpus Christi, Osmondthorpe, Leeds, was their last exercise in the style, opened in 1962. The Gothic formed another strand, from Reynolds's church of St Alphonsus, Brooks Bar, Manchester, of 1935, leading to their post-war work which, through the use of reinforced concrete portal frames, they developed into a conventional type of modern church with minimal stylistic references.¹¹ By the 1950s, while the founding partners remained a presence in the firm and oversaw designs, the initialled drawings show that many other architects and draughtsmen did the day-to-day work, most notably Mooney, Gordon Thorne, Harry Souter, Bill Dougherty and Ivor Winterbottom.¹²

Reynolds & Scott built over fifty churches across England from 1946, making them possibly the most prolific church architects in twentieth-century Britain.¹³ Nevertheless they have received almost no scholarly attention. This is partly because of a dearth of historical sources. As their buildings were uncontroversial, they generated little correspondence or debate, and only one church was published in the architectural press.¹⁴ Instead they published their work in the *Catholic Building Review*, an annual compendium of photographs and architects' descriptions aimed at the clergy. As typical rather than innovative buildings, rejecting modernist trends and contemporary discourses in church architecture, they seem to require an alternative form of historical enquiry, a material cultural analysis rather than a conventional architectural history narrative.

Reynolds & Scott's churches have also been considered aesthetically and historically deficient in terms of heritage value. St John the Baptist in Timperley, Manchester, of 1960, was listed by English Heritage, until a developer wishing to demolish it appealed. Their reassessment discovered that the 'Scott' of Reynolds & Scott had been incorrectly assumed to be Adrian Gilbert Scott, member of the more famous architectural dynasty and responsible for several Roman Catholic churches of the period. Justifying its decision to delist the building, English Heritage criticised its design: 'overall the church ... has some shortcomings; its placement on its plot is cramped and its materials are largely standard. However details have been skilfully used to both unify and add interest to the building'. Compared to churches by other architects of the period, the report argued, 'The church of St John the Baptist does not achieve the same level of accomplishment, conceived with less innovation, albeit executed proficiently'.¹⁵ This characterisation as proficient rather than innovative implies a lack of creativity, enough to remove the work from the heritage canon. It implicitly relegates the practice to the level of craft or commercial architecture. If,

however, these churches are accepted as ordinary, they are surely interesting as expressions of a particular culture of their time and place; and if they seem to lack the innovative methods of modernist architects, the creative methods they do employ invite further analysis.

CHURCH, SUBURB AND CLASS

In applying scholarship on the suburbs to Reynolds & Scott's churches, it becomes clear that suburban culture was translated into religious terms and had religious purposes. The churches must therefore be seen as hybrids of secular suburban culture and religion. Indeed for worshippers religion could not be easily separated from everyday life.¹⁶

Suburbs have generally been equated with the middle class, but this attribution can be challenged, especially for Manchester, where a working-class culture was pervasive. As noted, St Ambrose is located next to a middle-class inter-war suburb of timber-gabled neo-Tudor detached and semi-detached houses, some with individual architect-designed features and therefore higher in status than the average speculative semi. Yet the parish also encompasses social housing which would originally have been occupied by manual workers moved from Ancoats and other central districts. In such cases of mixed housing types churches seem to be placed alongside the private houses – perhaps because these are older and the site of the parish's first acquisitions of land – giving the impression of a middle-class association. This is true even at St Aidan, Wythenshawe, where Reynolds & Scott's church on this vast estate was sited alongside the older detached houses.

Nevertheless it has been argued that peripheral local authority housing was intended to bring upper working-class tenants into conformity with middle-class values, in houses and streets modelled closely on private housing.¹⁷ Manchester's planners were enthusiastic

about the Garden Suburb housing type, from its early model estate at Burnage (within which Reynolds & Scott's church of St Bernard was later built) to its post-war rehousing programmes.¹⁸ New social housing was relatively expensive, and councils prioritised tenants according to their conformity to bourgeois domesticity.¹⁹ In the 1950s, Willmott and Young discovered an aspirational culture among those moving to the suburbs, and an increasing uniformity of lifestyle between working and middle classes driven by a levelling of incomes and social emulation.²⁰ Arguably, therefore, the suburb promoted middle classness even if this was not always the reality. Reynolds & Scott's churches can therefore be understood in terms of middle-class culture. Indeed one of their most important patrons was the Diocese of Shrewsbury, which was one of the most suburban of English Catholic dioceses. It extended south of Manchester (including Wythenshawe and Heald Green), through Conservative-voting Cheshire (Reynolds & Scott designed churches in Chester and Alderley Edge) and west to include the Wirral, which by the 1950s was the area most often named by people in Liverpool as the place they aspired to live, and included churches such as the Sacred Heart, Moreton and Christ the King, Bromborough.²¹

The clients, parish priests and their dioceses, were often especially middle class in culture and ideals. There was little or no congregational involvement in the design of churches in British Catholic parishes before the Second Vatican Council. Typically, a parish priest would begin the process of building a church by requesting permission from the diocesan finance board, which would set a budget for the building. The priest would choose his architect, usually adhering to those already favoured by the diocese. The design would be developed between architect and priest, often within a month of permission being granted, and submitted to the finance board for approval.²² Between the architect, the priest and the diocesan clergy, the design of the church was a professional affair.

Parish priests, particularly before the Second Vatican Council, have been described as having an authoritarian approach to subservient and revering parishioners, and though this model seems too simplistic, priests were certainly often from middle-class backgrounds, received a long education, sometimes abroad, and had a professional status amongst parishioners akin to that of a doctor or teacher, as well as being effectively accountants and entrepreneurs in running their parishes.²³ Many in Manchester, as elsewhere in Britain, were Irish. George Tighe, who commissioned Reynolds & Scott for St Herbert, Chadderton in 1954, was born in Cavan, his father a banker and his mother from the Irish gentry. Trained in Dublin and at the English seminary at Ushaw, he was appointed to Chadderton in 1924 and remained until 1975.²⁴ Murtagh Henry at Burnage initiated a planned giving scheme on his arrival in 1953 which by 1957 had raised enough capital to begin the new church building.²⁵ Whatever their backgrounds, running a parish required significant administrative and managerial work.

The clearest signal of middle-class status amongst parish priests is in their purpose-built presbyteries, where they resided in groups of around two to four. Reynolds & Scott built many alongside their churches. Mediating between the corporate landmark of the church and the private suburban landscape of the family house, they resemble suburban houses, but of a higher status than most, detached from all but the church, and larger and more obviously customised (fig. 3). In plan they followed the middle-class house layout, including separate dining room and front sitting room, the latter often a semi-public space for meeting visitors, as it was in houses; a waiting room by the door and a housekeeper's room next to the kitchen showed their unusual function (fig. 4). From the mid-1950s to the early 1960s in the Diocese of Salford, the finance board would set between six and thirteen thousand pounds for the construction and furnishing of presbyteries. Even at the lowest

end, this was several times the purchase price of an average suburban house.²⁶ The public appearance of the presbytery was important to the diocese. When architects Greenhalgh & Williams presented proposals for one for St Winifred, Stockport, in 1960 and 1961, they were told it needed a 'more suitable frontage & entrance' and that the 'Garage as planned spoils [the] aspect of [the] house'.²⁷ Reynolds & Scott's presbyteries had elevations and entrances prominently fronting the road, a projecting gable often announcing their domestic function while echoing the angles and style of the church. The houses were distinguished from churches in detail as well as form, but were nevertheless integrated into the church designs: the type and treatment of brick was the same, much of the detailing was similar, and elements such as raised brick crosses and stained glass windows occurred on both. Stained glass was also a feature of developers' interwar semis, a consumer item that lent charm and status to the house as it did to the parish church and its presbytery, a feature that floats freely between domestic and religious cultures.²⁸

Just as the presbytery adapted a middle-class suburban vision of the house, the church also participated in a wider suburban culture of nostalgic domesticity. Alison Light argues that in the mid twentieth century there was a national trend – exemplified in fiction, often dealing with the suburb – towards a small scale, domestic conservatism, in which modernity could be accepted to the extent to which it could also be domesticated and accommodated to conservative sensibilities through a nostalgic appropriation of the past.²⁹ Law, emphasising popular engagement with modernity, also shows how it could be bizarrely hybridised with nostalgic symbols – notably in the interwar 'roadhouse', combining neo-Tudor timber beams with neon lights.³⁰ Such hybridity represents an alternative modern culture, accepting modernity, of which, after all, the suburb itself is a

part, while deliberately upsetting oppositions between modernity and nostalgia or tradition.³¹

Reynolds & Scott's churches often drew directly on the nostalgic culture of the suburb. This was perhaps less true of the Byzantine-Romanesque style of church, which suggested other traditions, and most evident in their frequent use of Gothic motifs. In churches such as St John the Baptist, Timperley and Sacred Heart, Moreton (fig. 5), the type of Gothic suggested is the late medieval or perpendicular style, historically close to the Tudor architecture associated with the rural gentry so much imitated in the suburbs.³² Moreton has a village church feel with its square, axial tower, and the area beneath its choir gallery and the reredos behind the altar are lined with wooden linenfold panelling. Timperley had vertical traceried windows in an approximately perpendicular style, though its interior parabolic arches were distinctively twentieth century. At Heald Green, an angular treatment of the brick exterior, including tower and rose window, established the church as clearly modern, but the interior was clad in stone and dark timber panelling, the latter described as 'linen-fold' by the parish priest.³³ Yet Heald Green was built with a steel structure, prominently illustrated in parish publications.³⁴ In many churches Reynolds & Scott used reinforced concrete portal frames, leaving their lines exposed to suggest Gothic vaulting, as their own descriptions sometimes noted. These included Our Lady of Lourdes, Hackenthorpe, Sheffield, of 1957 (fig. 6), and Sacred Heart, Gorton, Manchester, designed around 1959 with a Gothic rood screen ornamenting a modern brick facade.³⁵

The architects' descriptions of their churches often juxtaposed modern and traditional elements seemingly at random. Discussing Timperley, for example, they wrote:

The joinery including the benches has been executed in polished oak A loudspeaker system was installed in conjunction with acoustic treatment to give equal sound level throughout the Church. The terrazzo floors conceal an under-floor electric heating system and this Church was in fact the first in the Diocese to be heated in this way. Second only in importance to the High Altar is the Baptistry where the stone font is seen through wrought iron railings and on the wall behind the font a Mosaic panel depicts the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan. The site is well wooded and spacious lawns have been laid in front of the Church whilst, at the rear, car parking accommodation has been provided.³⁶

Modernity is both ostentatiously displayed and absorbed within imagery redolent of tradition and religion, and even English national identity, such as the oak and the lawns.

Historicising elements were used, however, not merely for purposes of suburban nostalgia but also for religious reasons. It was a requirement of Roman Catholic canon law that a church adhere to 'the forms received from Christian tradition', though the meaning of this passage could be widely interpreted. Joseph O'Connell's *Church Building and Furnishing: The Church's Way*, much used by Catholic church architects including Reynolds & Scott, authoritatively explained canon law and the rubrics of the liturgy, emphasising the importance of 'a certain traditional idea of a church, ... certain fundamental features or characteristics which are common to all Catholic churches'. O'Connell noted, however, that no style had ever been prescribed, leaving open the possibility of modern architectural forms.³⁷

Architectural evocations of Tudor England had a further relevance to English Catholics of this period, since they recalled narratives of the Reformation, of Catholics'

persecution and suppression. Parish histories frequently dwelt on this period, perhaps few more so than at West Didsbury. The church here was dedicated to St Ambrose of Milan, since the local martyr, Ambrose Barlow, executed in 1641, awaited canonisation. Nearby was his family's seat, Barlow Hall, a sixteenth-century house, albeit much rebuilt after a nineteenth-century fire. Eventually the church obtained a relic of the saint, installed in a shrine on the sanctuary. This relic came from the saint's skull, supposedly discovered at Wardley Hall in the outskirts of Manchester – a genuine Tudor mansion replete with timber panelling, associated with a recusant family, which had been acquired for use as the Roman Catholic Bishop of Salford's residence in 1930.³⁸ From Barlow Hall, which had become a golf clubhouse, the parish at West Didsbury also obtained an old bell, using it to announce the beginning of services. This connected liturgy in the new church to the historic site in the local Catholic imagination. In another, more unusual, example the foundation stone of Reynolds & Scott's church of Our Lady and St Edward, Blue Bell Hill, Nottingham, laid in 1954, incorporated a stone fragment of the city's medieval Franciscan Friary, dissolved at the Reformation, as part of a renewed foundation by a modern Franciscan congregation of which the parish church was a part.³⁹ Thus, underlying the modern suburban landscape Catholics discerned another historic landscape of noble recusant families, persecuted priests and lost monastic foundations with which they established a strong allegiance. Churches carrying stylistic echoes of the sixteenth century might strengthen such associations, as did the modern Gothic church in Nottingham; and although St Ambrose adopted the Byzantine-Romanesque style, its parishioners participated in a distinctively Catholic way in a suburban culture of nostalgic interest in the past.

A more fundamental cultural overlap between suburban conservatism and Roman Catholicism was the centrality of the family. Alana Harris shows that mid twentieth-century

Roman Catholic discourse advocated the model of the close knit nuclear family gathered around the hearth in prayer as a defence against the threats of secularism and materialism associated with modernity. The holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph formed a model for Catholic society, and devotional images of these figures decorated Catholic homes.⁴⁰ Inside churches of the period, side altars flanking the sanctuary would complement the eucharistic devotion of the central altar, depicting any two of the Virgin Mary, St Joseph (either of these often shown holding Christ as a child), and Christ as the Sacred Heart. The latter was a devotion associated with the home, as a picture or statue would be installed in parishioners' houses and blessed by the parish priest, a practice advocated by the mid century Bishop of Salford, Henry Marshall.⁴¹ The Catholic parish church therefore amplified the devotional aspects of the home and enshrined a sacred image of the family. Reynolds & Scott's drawings include sections showing the eastern, liturgical, ends of their churches to demonstrate this devotional image to clients. A section drawing for St Bernadette, Brinnington, for example, depicts statues of the Sacred Heart and Mary over the side altars (fig. 7); similar drawings were made for Chadderton and Gorton. Writing for a booklet commemorating the opening of Reynolds & Scott's Our Lady and St Joseph, Hanwell, London, in 1967, Cardinal Heenan of Westminster reminded the congregation of the parish's joint dedication to Mary and Joseph, invoking their blessing: 'May they together with their son Jesus give each family in Hanwell the grace to imitate the Holy Family of Nazareth'.⁴²

Despite Catholic clerics' anxiety over the threat of materialism represented by the suburb, the conservative culture of these areas was also domestic and family-oriented. While Catholic men were invited to lead their families in prayer, suburban men were, like Joseph, learning to share childcare with their wives and improve their houses through amateur carpentry.⁴³ The single-family house dominated the suburb, and – garden-fronted and

privet-hedged – represented an ideal of private seclusion within the urban sphere.⁴⁴ The imagery of the house, including timbered gables and porches, drives, gates and gardens, had a quasi-religious significance, and was widely disseminated as an icon, especially in advertising.⁴⁵

Reynolds & Scott's suburban churches echo this visual culture of domesticity. There are many instances of domestic detailing in their churches, a result of accepting standard techniques of building and craftsmanship. The most commonly used material in their churches was ordinary brick, also the standard material of suburbs, both of private and social housing. The latter was especially distinguishable by the use of brick with minimal adornment, while in private houses brick would be complemented with tile, timber and render. Reynolds & Scott's churches enliven the use of brick by mixing brick colours (at Bromborough); using brick for arches and decorative framing (Burnage); and relief brickwork for crosses and other patterns, much like the diamond motifs on suburban houses. The Romanesque-Byzantine style made a virtue of plain walls and towers of brick, and perhaps for that reason seems to have been preferred for churches in local authority estates: at Osmondthorpe, Leeds; St Patrick, Leicester (fig. 8); Burnage and Weaverham, Reynolds & Scott's churches complemented the hard brick landscape of housing.

Other materials and imagery also borrowed from houses. Tiles were sometimes used at gable corners or in place of keystones, notably at Timperley. Inside, the timber panelling used most extensively at Moreton and Heald Green was also a feature of many interwar neo-Tudor houses, especially their entrance halls. Doors were of conventional timber panelled construction, even those for ceremonial use, though like those of private houses, entrance doors were given more elaborate treatment including decorative hinges. Joiners, unlike bricklayers, seem to have required designs for every detail, and relatively ordinary

doors, windows and furnishings formed a substantial proportion of the drawings for any church (fig. 9).

Domestic imagery extended from material treatments to specific motifs. Churches in areas of private housing often reflected their surroundings. At Heald Green, the street-facing gable of the presbytery echoes the unusual geometry of nearby gambrel-roofed houses in this well-heeled suburban town, and the church's roof structure and buttresses repeat the angular form (fig. 10). Inside Christ the King, Bromborough, the nave roof appears to be supported by thin timber trusses (in fact decorative), like a procession of semi-detached gables (fig. 11). In many cases the choice of Gothic relates to a context of private housing and neo-Tudor architecture. The church at Moreton lies behind a shopping parade with half-timbered gables and an elaborate neo-Tudor pub; at Timperley, the presbytery of joined-up semis has half-timbered gables, carefully drawn in relation to the church in the architects' elevations (fig. 12).

Reynolds & Scott's churches may draw upon domestic imagery, but they cannot be mistaken for houses. Instead, the domestic is ennobled and made sacred. This is achieved by adhering to a recognisable volumetric form, and by enlarging the sizes of basic elements; through serial repetition of simple forms such as columns, windows and wooden beams; through the addition of unmistakably churchy features such as towers, crosses and statues of saints; and through rich interior decoration, particularly in Byzantine-Romanesque churches, where plain exteriors often conceal colourful marble and mosaic. The domestic details of Reynolds & Scott's churches make them cognate with their surroundings, but scale, form and symbolism separate them. The architects appear to have sought to express the idea, therefore, of the church as the 'house of God', also advocated by O'Connell, a

meaning which is conveyed by adopting the visual idea of a house from the context of the twentieth-century British suburb.⁴⁶

Domestic metaphors were sometimes used by the clergy when addressing parishioners about Reynolds & Scott's churches. For a booklet promoting fundraising for Christ Church, Heald Green during its construction in 1961, the Bishop of Shrewsbury, John Murphy, wrote an extended parallel between establishing a new parish and leaving home to begin a new household:

Helping a priest to build a new parish is rather like building up a new home. ... Once we start to set up a home of our own simple things like towels, sheets, blankets, carpets, take on a new look, and even a new richness. We begin to study sideboards, crockery, curtains, even pots and pans, as if we had never seen them before, and by the time we do open up on our own excitement has reached such a pitch that we live, think and sleep in our ideal home. ... It is much the same with a new Parish. ... You are setting out to build a home for Christ which is your very own, built with your own effort, your own labour, your own money. ... For we are not merely interested in building a house for Christ, but a home for Christ; not merely a new Church, but a new Parish.⁴⁷

McGowan adopted a motto, 'My house is a house of prayer': a phrase used by Christ in the gospels to describe the temple of Jerusalem, which McGowan thought demanded 'an atmosphere rooted in tradition, of gentleness and warmth', though achieved with 'full use of modern materials and technology'.⁴⁸

The idea of the fortress church attributed to the period before the Second Vatican Council, partly on the basis of the imposing church buildings of the mid twentieth century, can be revised through this analysis. Churches may have been distinctive and visually prominent in the suburban landscape, but they also forged sacred spaces out of the ordinary material forms presented by the suburb, and adapted the existing domestic and family-focused culture of the suburb to religious purposes.

MIDDLEBROW DESIGN PROCESS

Reynolds & Scott's churches, however, are less notable for their relationship to surrounding houses than for their adherence to conventional ecclesiastical forms, and for their strong family resemblances to each other. While accepting some modern techniques such as the use of steel construction, the architects ignored the discourse on modern church architecture in the architectural press. This argued that architects should reject ecclesiastical conventions or historical precedents, to consider the eucharistic liturgy as the church building's main function and seek new spatial forms to accommodate it.⁴⁹ These ideas were endorsed by the Second Vatican Council, but were adopted by some architects much earlier. Not far from Manchester, modernist architects Weightman & Bullen designed churches for the Archdiocese of Liverpool from the late 1950s experimenting with wide square plans, hexagons and circles, describing their buildings in liturgical terms. Meanwhile Reynolds & Scott's churches remained obstinately longitudinal. A parish history of Heald Green written after the Second Vatican Council compares the new church unfavourably with the intimate nature of worship that had been experienced temporarily in the hall: 'Now the priest seemed to be separated and apart The Altar rails were formal, the pulpit was formal, the Altar was formal, and all the formality emphasised distance'.⁵⁰

If Weightman & Bullen were the *avant garde*, Reynolds & Scott were conservatives; not, however, through ignorance, but by preference. As architects to the Roman Catholic teacher training college at Hopwood Hall, Middleton, in the early 1960s, their client, the De La Salle order, had asked them to nominate a notable modern architect to design the chapel, and their choice was Frederick Gibberd, architect of the new (modernist and circular) Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, then awaiting construction. Gibberd provided an inventive liturgical scheme for the chapel with a central altar adapted from his Liverpool design, and Reynolds & Scott acted as executive architects.⁵¹ They thus acquired experience of modernist forms and principles which they did not apply to parish churches. Their accounts in the *Catholic Building Review* often emphasise adherence to tradition. St Bernadette, Whitefield had 'all the features usually found in a Church planned on orthodox lines'; St Theresa, Blacon, was 'Gothic in character'; Hackenthorpe, 'whilst modern in general has nevertheless an echo of tradition of the Perpendicular style'.⁵² Sometimes they adopted liturgical arguments in favour of conventional plans. At Osmondthorpe, Leeds, 'the traditional basilican or aisled plan concentrates the perspective to the High Altar', and, at Burnage, the 'rhythm of columns and arches along both sides ... lead[s] to the High Altar, the focus of the whole Church'.⁵³

Tying this overt traditionalism to the conservative culture of the suburb, critical theories of the 'middlebrow' offer ways of understanding Reynolds & Scott's churches through potential insights into both an artistic design process and middle-class culture, and also correlate to religious principles. More usually applied to literature, the term 'middlebrow' defines creative works whose authors address a broad, commercially-attractive audience, usually assumed to be middle class. Such work may loosely imitate or conventionalise *avant garde* modernist works, making their forms accessible and pleasurable,

often after a delay, to distinguish itself from popular mass-market forms of culture.⁵⁴

Reynolds & Scott's use of modernised Gothic and Byzantine-Romanesque styles simplified an approach that emerged between the wars. Welch, Cachemaille-Day & Lander's St Saviour at Eltham, London of 1934 marked a modern expressionist approach to the Gothic which is adopted in more basic terms in some of Reynolds & Scott's post-war churches, such as Hackenthorpe, with its flat-roofed brick exterior. Even in the 1930s, however, for example in Eugène Roulin's book *Modern Church Architecture*, churches by Cachemaille-Day and others were praised in opposition to austere modern movement churches by architects such as Rudolph Schwarz, and so may be considered as middlebrow themselves.⁵⁵

Reynolds & Scott sometimes dispensed with stylistic references altogether, designing churches with simple reinforced concrete structures, triangular gables giving a familiar ecclesiastical form and mosaic inserts, ironwork or modern artworks enriching their interiors. Their churches at Partington, Manchester (fig. 13) and the Ermine estate, Lincoln, both of the early 1960s, are examples of this more modern type, and Our Lady and St Joseph, Hanwell is a more original take on it, with a tall west front with modern sculpture, and interesting treatment of the concrete frame with black dye and surface patterning (fig. 14). This church type corresponds to Buggeln's 'A-frame church' – a hybrid between the contemporary and the traditional – disliked by conservatives as too modern and by modernists as too traditional.⁵⁶ The modernising elements of Reynolds & Scott's churches were stylistic rather than substantial, but Hanwell shows that even in this relatively standardised church form there was great potential for creative variety.

Much of Reynolds & Scott's work looks standardised and repeated. There is an overall formula followed in the majority of churches, regardless of style, which is common to most Roman Catholic churches in Britain before the Second Vatican Council: a basilican

form with a long nave, a deep chancel with the altar on a platform at its rear, the rear wall decorated as a reredos according to the chosen style. Side chapels flank the sanctuary. A low narthex at the rear has the choir gallery above it and two smaller subsidiary spaces in its corners, one often containing the font, the other a stair to the gallery. The entrance façade is usually higher than the nave and given richer ornament. For vertical emphasis there is often a tower in one corner, or the nave is heightened into a low tower or domed feature where it meets the sanctuary. These spatial features represent an assumed traditional image of the church interpreted as a straightforward formula to be maintained rather than questioned. Early design drawings often seem intended to demonstrate the presence of all these features (fig. 15).

Reynolds & Scott's practice also had their own design habits. There are often transept-like features, either fully projecting, such as the baptistery at St Joseph, Wembley, or so shallow that they appear vestigial, as at St Herbert, Chadderton. They are often gabled or hip-roofed and contain framed windows, even when the Gothic is used, as at Moreton. This element is present in Reynolds's earliest buildings, St Alphonsus, Brooks Bar and St Willibrord, Clayton, and became almost a trademark of the practice. Another frequently adopted element was the use of layers of concentric brick arches over main entrances and windows, whether of Gothic or Romanesque-Byzantine form, for example at both Timperley and Burnage (fig. 16). Smaller groups of churches have repeated elements: St Patrick, Leicester and St Joseph, Wembley (fig. 17) both have three shallow domes over similar naves, an echo of Westminster Cathedral. The Byzantine-Romanesque style was used with little variation in a number of economical churches of the mid-1950s, including St Thomas More, Leicester and English Martyrs, Alvaston.

Despite such similarities the drawings show that hardly any features were directly copied from one to another. In a sample of sixteen sets of drawings only one appears to be reused, and that is for the fonts at St Thomas More, Leicester and St Bede, Weaverham, in 1952, rather than for any intrinsic architectural element. Indeed, the drawings are remarkable for the extent of detailed design of every aspect of the churches including light fittings, pews and all liturgical furnishings. Full sized details are provided for cornices at Heald Green, and there are drawings for such minor elements as holy water stoups, the fixings of crosses in towers, internal doors and coping details for boundary walls, suggesting that every element was designed from scratch. The resemblances between the churches must therefore be due to an office culture, perhaps to the supervision of Reynolds and Scott themselves, and to certain habits of drawing and design sustained across many different buildings, by different architects or draughtsmen. Usually one architect worked predominantly on one building – Mooney’s first church was St Bernard, Burnage, for example, for which he made all but one drawing. Designs therefore maintain consistency – doors, windows, pews and so on reflected the overall style. At Souter’s church, Bromborough, for example, the same geometry of a Gothic arch was repeated. Occasionally several architects worked on one building – at Heald Green, the lead architect was Thorne, Mooney did much later detailing, and numerous draughtsmen signed other drawings – but consistency was nevertheless maintained. Mooney asserts that the younger architects adhered to an idea of how a Reynolds & Scott church should look. A practice culture was therefore sustained through the architects’ own acceptance and absorption of the firm’s previous work.⁵⁷

Drawings for Byzantine-Romanesque columns at comparable churches suggest how this habitual design method might have operated. The columns of St Joseph, Wembley and

St Bernard, Burnage (fig. 18) appear initially the same, but are different in proportion. The drawings are constructed in similar ways using the compass and the same simple curved shapes for their capitals. Many of the section drawings for churches use broad compass sweeps to define semicircles and segmental curves, and buildings often use many multiples of the same feature. At Burnage, for example, the vault is a semicircle, the aisles are defined by rows of identical columns carrying identical semicircular arches, and the round-headed arches cut repeated intersecting semicircles into the vault. Round arches also mark the ends of the aisles and the entrance doors (fig. 19). Achieved through efficient and straightforward drawing techniques, this repetition of simple forms creates an overall harmony of space and shape when experienced in the building and may also be responsible for the overall feeling of resemblance across many of the churches.

This culture of similarity without repetition and economical design methods can also be related to the middlebrow. Bourdieu identifies the latter with commercial serial production for the widest or average audience, and Nicola Humble also associates middlebrow literature with commercial dissemination to wide (suburban) readerships.⁵⁸ Both, however, accept a creative process which crafts every element anew, as indeed in such media as novels and films it must, while also engaging with the realities of rapid or large scale production and the desire for easy acceptance by the consumer. Reynolds & Scott's design techniques also had such an effect. Knowing their previous work, a parish priest would ask for a church like one they had already built, and the diocese would accept their proposals with little comment. Their churches must have been easy to tailor for different budgets, and to quantify in cost – and, unusually, the firm employed a team of four quantity surveyors to ensure accurate quotations for their clients.⁵⁹ Known elements such as the transept features could be omitted, as at Chadderton, or multiplied and extended, as at St

Patrick, Leicester, each element having a known quantity of materials and therefore cost.

The Byzantine-Romanesque style in particular lent itself to simplicity (at Alvaston) or increased ornamental complexity (at Wembley) without compromise in overall effect. It could be scaled up or down without much change to details. The style represented a common sense method of rationalised traditional construction, in which bricks and columns could be easily measured, counted and costed, and repetition saved time in design.

Although this may have been true in principle, in 1963 the Salford Diocesan Finance Board blocked Reynolds & Scott from building churches for the diocese 'owing to recurring inefficiencies'. In fact this decision followed a single disastrous mistake in a complicated enlargement of an older church, St Joseph at Reddish.⁶⁰ In general, Reynolds & Scott's reception by their clients contrasts with those of modernist firms. Theoretically, modern movement architects would consider every design from scratch without any precedent in mind, each new project being a novel resolution of a distinct set of problems. As a result the design process would involve what Dana Cuff describes as a 'burden of perpetual discovery', with a significant element of 'guesswork' in finding new solutions, and consequently potential surprises for both architect and client.⁶¹ The opposite was true for Reynolds & Scott, whose clients found their expectations confirmed. In only a few cases were early designs modified, and usually only because of changes in budget (at Gorton, for example, where a towered façade was abandoned). While Reynolds & Scott's churches were normally passed with little or no debate by the Salford finance board, adventurous designs by Bolton architects Greenhalgh & Williams were twice rejected with the advice that 'a more traditional style' was required, while other architects were asked for further explanation, delaying the design process.⁶² St Joseph, Nelson, by Peter R. Nuttall & Associates was subjected to such probing. In December 1961 a scheme was approved subject to revisions,

‘especially with regard to lighting’. In January 1962 the board reported ‘Still further slight revision required & model to be shown to Board at later meeting’. The following month one elevation was approved but detailed drawings were requested and other elevations were to be resubmitted. Once finally authorised, the projected costs had risen, and in May 1962 a higher budget was approved.⁶³ Modernist buildings could also be more risky in construction since architects adopted new technologies and designed new construction details rather than accept existing methods. Mooney, by contrast, did not even dare to use reinforced concrete in case of failure, whose costs might fall on the architect.⁶⁴ Predictability was advantageous to architects and their clients. The parish priest could have a church approved without delay and built without incident or unexpected expense.

A design could be tailored to a lower budget by reducing the specifications in materials. In economical churches carved stone was replaced by artificial moulded stone; and, contrary to modernist design principles of exposed construction, many of Reynolds & Scott’s churches concealed their structures to achieve effects that would otherwise have been beyond reach of the budget. Thus, vaults and domes were made with plaster, concealing steel truss roofs. Though apparently influenced by Arts & Crafts architecture, Reynolds & Scott rejected Ruskinian principles of authenticity of craftsmanship. The Gothic style arches of Bromborough’s nave arcade are made of concrete beams cast to that shape, for example; and ornament often has no function, as with Timperley’s entrance doors, where elaborate ‘dummy hinges’ conveyed only an image of craftsmanship. Such design procedures suggest a commercial mindedness that dispenses with the inconvenient principles of high architecture, addressing an audience for whom these principles are unimportant. They may tend to confirm Bourdieu’s unsympathetic assessment of the middlebrow as attempting to

display aspects of high culture beyond the consumer's means to do so, and as screening reality with a veil of superficial cultural imagery.⁶⁵

Yet such surface effects of style have another purpose, also associated with the middlebrow, namely, to emphasise the rules of genre. In fiction, the middlebrow is characterised by a playful approach to genre, exploring its rules and often combining different genres in unexpected ways.⁶⁶ Reynolds & Scott's designs similarly accepted certain limits on form within architectural genres, and applied imaginative creativity in exploring the ways in which the imagined type of the church could be made present to the viewer. As such, their architecture is a sort of typological game. In the firm's drawings, each iteration of the genre seems to be a creative improvisation, drawing new forms within the genre in order to fix it in a new situation. The firm actively regenerated and renewed 'tradition' in each new building through a process of artistic creation.⁶⁷

At this point middlebrow design culture met religious culture. The idea of achieving a building adhering to rules of genre meets O'Connell's demand that a church should look like a church by embodying a traditional idea of its appearance; and it is the surface appearance that is therefore a primary concern. This pre-eminence of the genre image is confirmed by David Morgan's explanation of the workings of religious visual culture: that images can become imbued with sacred significance when they meet recognised conditions, including 'conformity to previous experience or corroboration by other representations', and 'that an image presents ... the ideal, typical, or formulaic appearance of a subject'.⁶⁸ Thus in using familiar forms which declare the building unmistakably to be a Roman Catholic church to people in a particular place, Reynolds & Scott invited those who saw it to endow the building with sacred meaning, making God present within it to those inclined to believe in that possibility. These buildings, therefore, situated in the suburb's modernity, made out

of modernity in their fabric, technologies and funding, and forged through modern middlebrow cultural practices of typological creativity and an architecture of image, deploy that modernity to bring the sacred into everyday life.⁶⁹

Hybrids of modernity and the sacred, the everyday and the infinite, Reynolds & Scott's churches are also hybrid in their sources of conventions. This is because the idea of what a church should look like arose not only locally but also through an international religious visual culture. Reynolds and Scott both won travel studentships to Italy while students at the Manchester School of Architecture in 1929, and their journey, which included Rome, was both an established aspect of architectural culture and a pilgrimage to the heart of their faith, including an encounter with the pope.⁷⁰ Building churches with mosaics, marble, Cosmati-patterned floors, domes and belltowers was a way of bringing the Roman basilica back to the British suburb, where its southern otherness transported the viewer to the source of their religion. In some churches the evocation of the Roman basilica extended to minor details. At St Willibrord, Clayton, for example, the stained glass windows were made to resemble alabaster. As a hybrid between the exotic and the familiar, the Italian and the British, the ancient and modern, the Byzantine-Romanesque church could also hint at other origins. At Burnage, the architects noted that they had used twelve different types of marble from five different countries, including Carrara, Siena and Pavonazzo from Italy. Indeed the usual marble installers in Manchester churches were Italian family firms, notably Alberti and Quilligotti (who also supplied terrazzo flooring, for example at West Didsbury). But Burnage also included black and green marbles from Ireland, evoking the Irish origins of its parish priest and probably a large majority of its parishioners.⁷¹ This style of church was also familiar in Ireland, often with an overtly Celtic treatment known as the 'Hiberno-Romanesque', but also in more Italianate variants, predominating there in the 1950s under a

conservative hierarchy. Romanesque and Byzantine styles of church were also widespread across Europe and America between the wars.⁷² Reynolds & Scott's churches thus inserted into the suburb a complex transnational space, produced by the modernities of international migration and communication, adapted to their situation and harnessed to a sacred purpose.

VERNACULAR CREATIVITY

A design process of creative improvisation within a given framework also characterises the vernacular in architecture. Andrew Derrick has described the basilican church tradition of the mid twentieth century as a form of vernacular, and further exploring the implications of his assertion seems apt.⁷³ The term 'vernacular' means something different in almost every scholarly discipline, but applies in three key senses to the work of Reynolds & Scott: the sense of a common, ordinary mode of building; the creative remaking of the buildings through occupation; and the lived religious practices of their users.

In older architectural definitions, such as Oliver's, the vernacular is seen as 'of the people', 'owner- or community-built', and using 'traditional technologies', terms that do not apply to these buildings.⁷⁴ Yet assessments of vernacular design process are close to the ways in which the drawings suggest that Reynolds & Scott worked.⁷⁵ In these accounts, vernacular building conforms to underlying models established in a culture, essentially a type or genre, consisting of fixed dispositions of spaces in plan and volume, and consistent proportions – just as there is a consistent spatial arrangement in Reynolds & Scott's churches regardless of style. The basic type is then modified according to circumstances of economy or site, the models adapted through operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication or enlargement of scale of set features. This might be applied to the transept motif, for example, which could be extended, multiplied, or reduced to a cipher; or the column bay or A-frame,

in which the nave could be lengthened or shortened depending on the seating requirements by simple addition or subtraction (and future extension easily permitted, as at Knighton); or the aisles, which could be defined with transverse arches and rows of columns (at Burnage or Hackenthorpe), or omitted to leave simple passages between pews and walls (at Chadderton or Gorton). The spatial form is then overlaid with a dressing of ornament, more variable and responsive to fashion: an aspect of the design process that could apply to the choice of style (the modern being merely one style, plainer and more angular than the others, rather than a new approach to design) and the use of materials – plain columns of cast stone at Burnage, carved marble columns at Wythenshawe.

Architectural historians have broadened notions of the vernacular and further explored its design processes. Elizabeth McKellar, for example, sees the Georgian terrace as produced through reference to nearby buildings, and deriving from a consensus about appearance and construction between clients and builders.⁷⁶ Likewise, Mooney recalls that parish priests would specify the style and specific elements in commissioning a design, naming existing churches by Reynolds & Scott as models, or in the case of Burnage, looking out of the architect's window onto Manchester Town Hall and asking for a doorway with receding arches like those of its portal.⁷⁷ Peter Guillery also offers a broader view of vernacular that can embrace Reynolds & Scott's churches: they are buildings predicated on an '[e]mphasis on continuities and the taken-for-granted', but whose 'cultural conservatism [is] a socially dynamic force'.⁷⁸ And while the vernacular is usually associated with the house, Guillery and others have shown that church design can be considered vernacular in these and other senses.⁷⁹

Many elements of Reynolds & Scott's churches were supplied by others without the architects' input, so that there is also a more literal vernacular element. Flooring and marble

designs were not drawn by the architects, but decided by their craftsmen, no doubt in dialogue with the priest. Mosaic decorations at West Didsbury and some other churches were left to the mosaicists, usually the firm of Oppenheimer.⁸⁰ At Burnage, the parish priest insisted the stained glass windows be provided by the Dublin firm of Earley, and they were made without reference to the architects.⁸¹ The churches were therefore 'designed' by a wider community of craftsmen and artists, often unnamed apart from the company title, who shared an understanding of the type or genre. The architects' drawings are accordingly often mere outlines of forms with blank fields for later decoration.

At Christ Church, Heald Green, McGowan had a greater ambition to create a church that would be distinguished by artworks. With the architects' advice he commissioned J.E. Nuttgens for a series of stained glass windows showing the Stations of the Cross, an accomplished work by a noted artist, though somewhat old fashioned by then, using traditional techniques and representational figures. McGowan sought the rest of his church's decoration independently, commissioning ecclesiastical artists Edward and James Blackwell of Manchester to design the interiors and furnishings, employing stainless steel alongside more conventional marble (fig. 20). A figure of the Virgin and Child was provided by George and Doreen Dereford, well known just then for an innovative technique of colourful mosaic on a sculptural concrete base. This organised programme of creative work shows the potential power of a parish priest over the visual appearance of the church. Indeed the parish history insists that it was his vision, rather than that of the architects.⁸²

Other modes of the vernacular further exceeded the architects' control. The churches can be seen not as static end products of a design process but as continually recreated through the creative endeavours of their owners and users through their embellishment and maintenance. Many of the churches were opened incomplete and gradually decorated,

moments of enrichment often associated with special events or anniversaries. St Willibrord, Clayton, for example, had a plain interior on opening in 1938, and was decorated only after the war, with marble altars and mosaic floors by Oppenheimer. In 1949 mosaics were added over the side chapels and the altar rails installed to celebrate the silver jubilee of the parish priest F. Buckley's ordination. A substantial mosaic was installed in the apse in 1958, and a marble pulpit supplied by Alberti was added in 1962 (fig. 21).⁸³ St Herbert, Chadderton, had a similarly lengthy process of decoration.⁸⁴ What seem coherent designs could be the cumulative efforts of parishes, sometimes lasting decades.

Repainting Reynolds & Scott's expansive wall surfaces with new colours, and even ordinary maintenance and repair, can also be seen as vernacular processes, in which an architectural form is continually recreated and subtly altered.⁸⁵ So too can the churches' many temporary decorations, such as the wooden cribs erected by parishioners at Christmas. Dwyer, Gilbert and Ahmed argue that such activities show a profound compulsion in suburban culture towards the making of sacred spaces through vernacular creative practice.⁸⁶ This vernacular production must also be seen as the initial precondition for Reynolds & Scott's churches, an intrinsic but now invisible aspect of their existence. Parish fundraising for new buildings involved enormous and inventive efforts, a creative ferment serving to generate community.⁸⁷ Mid twentieth-century suburban churches can equally be seen as vernacular in Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk's application of this term to religion, as the experienced and enacted 'lived religion' of the buildings' congregations, engaged in the religious activities for which they were built. Here, the universal forms of such acts are inflected by the space and imagery of each church in locally specific ways.⁸⁸

Reynolds & Scott built few churches after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, partly because Reynolds, the driving force in obtaining commissions, died in 1967.⁸⁹ By then a few of their churches included minor accommodations to the new liturgical thinking endorsed by the council's documents. At Bromborough, designed around 1962 and opened in 1964, and Corpus Christi, Nottingham, around the same time, seating was placed in deep transepts bringing the congregation around three sides of the altar. Yet the church at Hanwell, opened in 1967, made no significant concessions to liturgical ideas. It was designed around 1962, and neither Reynolds & Scott nor the parish priest felt it necessary to change the design in response to the council.⁹⁰

Several of Reynolds & Scott's later churches do demonstrate a new approach, finally emulating the innovative plan types which became normal by the mid 1960s. St Pius X, Alderley Edge was designed by Bernard Popland in 1965 and built in 1968 with a rectangular, hall-like form, the altar placed against a long wall of the rectangle and the congregational seating arranged around it.⁹¹ Saints Peter and Paul, Boultham of 1965 had a broad fan-shaped plan and strikingly modern appearance. One of the firm's last churches, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Leicester, opened in 1975, fully accepted modern movement principles. Its seating radiated from the altar in a fan shape, and a tall tent-like roof indicated the off-centre position of the altar.⁹² This church was small, seating 350, and by 1970 soaring building costs and falling church attendance deprived Reynolds & Scott's younger architects of opportunities to experiment further.

Yet this narrative of decline contrasts with the fate of the firm's churches. Despite lacking any heritage protection, most remain little altered and well used. Reynolds & Scott's preference for established building techniques meant that they were largely free of the building and maintenance problems that often persisted in modernist churches. The

preservation of the churches also indicates that the liturgical developments of the 1960s and 1970s could be accommodated with few alterations to buildings not designed for them. The congregations' experiences of liturgy in Reynolds & Scott's churches are likely to differ from those in post-conciliar churches: altars are distant from pews, even when moved forward; the acoustics require more formal diction than in smaller churches. The fact that liturgy itself is creatively improvised in each place and time means that its expression differs in every context, and Reynolds & Scott's churches may lend themselves to conservative reinterpretations of the Second Vatican Council and liturgical change.⁹³ They also suggest that narratives of twentieth-century Roman Catholicism that emphasise rupture are often too simplistic. As Harris argues, there are many under-appreciated continuities across the period, including the continued use of older churches with little alteration.⁹⁴

This analysis coincides well with Richard Kieckhefer's reassessment of the basilican church. The conventional basilican church possessed community-generating potential and relevant meanings for the twentieth-century suburb before the arrival of a modernist determinism equating diagrammatic spaces of community with the latter's achievement. Kieckhefer argues that the basilican form can express a complex interplay of transcendence and immanence, the universal and the particular, raising the congregation out of the ordinary world, while at the same time bringing the sacred into the mundane sphere at a particular time and place. It is already an intrinsically communal form, he contends, 'bonding the congregation, giving it a sense of collectively experienced and collectively valued encounter with the divine'.⁹⁵ The mid twentieth-century British suburb furnished the material out of which the faithful, including the architects, forged a vision of heaven in their churches, in which suburban residents could find themselves bound to their neighbours in a manifestation and accomplishment of the kingdom of God.

The churches of Reynolds & Scott, like other ordinary and overlooked spaces, can and should be examined seriously as manifestations of life in twentieth-century British cities. While narratives of modernity and modernism highlight radical new developments, the everyday tends to fade into the background as the context against which the overtly modern detaches itself. Yet suburbs and their places of worship, made by communities to bring themselves together in the presence of their gods, are as characteristic phenomena of the twentieth century as the tower block or the motorway. Suburbs constitute the greatest part of British towns in extent and population, and big brick churches are familiar landmarks in this twentieth-century landscape of semi-detached houses and gardens. Within the imagined constraints of predetermined genre forms, and working within and accepting a suburban material culture, in what might be called a middlebrow vernacular mode of design, the architects working in the office of Reynolds & Scott, like many others of a similar inclination, exercised a creativity different from but no less valid than that of their more celebrated modernist counterparts. The spaces they created offered sites of creativity, community, identity and transcendence to suburban residents.

NOTES

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- 2 Sixteen sets of drawings on microfilm were studied for this article (the originals have been lost). The archive has recently been deposited at Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections (MMUSC). For a database of Roman Catholic churches see Patrimony Committee of the Bishops' Conference and English Heritage, *Taking stock: Catholic churches of England & Wales*, <http://taking-stock.org.uk>, 2005 to present, accessed 2 February 2017.
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http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=406218, accessed 4 January 2106.
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- 20 P. Willmott and M. Young, *Family and Class in a London Suburb*, London, 1960, 15, 23; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 62-63.
- 21 Chapman, *The Home and Social Status*, 163 (and preceding pages for further context).
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